

The Man without Guile.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

St. MARGARET's Church, Westminster,

On SUNDAY, May 13. 1753.

Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend SCAWEN
KENRICK, D. D. Sub-Dean of Westminster,
and Minister of the said Parish.

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By JOHN BUTLER, L.L.D.

CHAPLAIN to her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager
of WALES.

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JOHN i. 47.

Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.

WE have no other character of NATHANAEL in the new testament than that here given of him, which is illustrated by a memorable circumstance or two in the story. PHILIP had told him with pleasure, that JESUS of Nazareth was the man, of whom MOSES and the prophets had written. NATHANAEL having the common prejudices of his countrymen, that so illustrious a person as the MESSIAH would not be described by so obscure a name as Nazareth, freely contradicted him, and honestly confessed, that the reason why he did not believe it was the national prejudice he had imbibed. Thus prepared he came to our SAVIOUR, and was received with the encomium of my text. It seems to have been

characteristical, for NATHANAEL immediately asked, whence knowest thou me? Our LORD was willing to shew how well he knew him, by putting his integrity to the trial, and encountering the prepossessions of this honest man with an evidence of his own divinity. Before that PHILIP called thee, says he, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. It is proved by a learned writer to have been the hour of prayer, when he was under the fig-tree, and he is supposed to have had there some divine impression upon his mind concerning the MESSIAH, to which our SAVIOUR here alludes. It is well known, how strong the Jewish prejudices were concerning the temporal power and figure of the MESSIAH. NATHANAEL had avowed these prejudices just before he was struck with this evidence. He now concluded, that nothing less than divine omniscience could be a witness to what passed in his mind under the fig-tree, and retracting at once the declaration he had made before, he said, RABBI, thou art the son of God, thou art the King of Israel. So here are two instances of the noble simplicity of the man, which will amply justify the character by which our SAVIOUR distinguishes him. He freely declared his opinion, without the usual reserve of designing men, and he retracted it as soon as he was convinced of his error. He that was capable
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of this, must have been pure and upright enough in other respects to deserve the name of an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. An Israelite indeed, for, as St. PAUL says, they are not all Israel, which are of Israel; and our LORD himself authorizes that opinion by saying to the Jews, if ye were ABRAHAM's children, ye would do the works of ABRAHAM. They were ever forward to make a merit of their descent from ABRAHAM, flattering themselves, that his righteousness would be imputed to them. But as it was unfair, and disingenuous for bad men, to claim an advantage from ABRAHAM's name, so we may conclude, that the reason why this man was stiled an Israelite indeed, was, that he did not shelter himself under vain pretences, and was truly a descendent of the patriarchs, for his virtues exemplified his extraction.

My text presents before us a most amiable character, of which the observers of mankind complain, that it exists in speculation rather than in fact. For the honor of human nature one would wish to disprove the charge, but the temptations to insincerity are so various, that it is not matter of wonder, if we meet with very few men, in whom there is no guile. Education, custom, example, and sometimes even reputation, are all engaged on the

the other side; and in an enlighten'd age, which rejects the notion of divine judgments consequent upon any act as an exploded superstition, nothing is more common than to determine the merit of fraud and cunning from the success of it. Hence great part of the intercourse of mankind with each other consists in pretences; and those expressions of kindness, which originally flowed from the honesty of a benevolent heart, degenerate into a mere idiom of language.

HOWEVER, I will not join with such malignant moralists, who to represent virtue, which themselves do not practise, as impracticable, are perpetually exposing and exaggerating the worst side of human nature. Tho' it be rare, there is such a phenomenon in the christian world, as the man without guile; and we of this congregation have an evidence of it in the melancholy idea which my text excites, the worthy, exemplary and upright character I am about to celebrate.

FUNERAL panegyrics were originally designed as auxiliaries to us, in recommending piety and virtue from the consideration of some striking instance of mortality, or from the excellencies of the person departed. By degrees the best institutions are corrupted. The declaimer was expected
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to gratify the vanity of survivors, by attributing, like the indiscrete writer of an epitaph, all human perfections to the person whose memory he celebrates. This naturally weakened the force and lessened the credit of discourses of this sort. But I am encouraged to lay before you the example of my deceased friend by this happy circumstance, that you yourselves were witnesses to most of his virtues; and therefore, instead of disgusting, by the imperfect justice I shall do to his memory, I might have been justly censured by others, and should certainly have condemned myself, for omitting it.

It is besides matter of general experience, that example affects the mind more powerfully than precept. We daily observe this to be the case with bad example, that its influence extends even to persons who would abhor it if reduced to a formal lesson. To counteract this mischief, men of the greatest genius have in all ages studied to support the cause of virtue by presenting before the world some imaginary perfect character. And such an example, tho' it never existed, has in many cases had its effect. It has animated the hero, inspired the patriot, and administer'd comfort to virtue in distress. But tho' fiction has many advantages of ornament, which truth never assumes,

fumes, yet we feel the instruction of an excellent character, that falls within our own observation, much more sensibly, than that conveyed by the beauties of an image, which the poet or historian present to our minds. This being the case, it seems needless to apologize for the review of a christian character, and one so very exemplary, that whilst the memory of it is preserved, the example must in some degree operate.

SIMPLICITY is one of those words, which men have studiously deprived of its signification. From conveying to us an idea of the highest ornament of the human character, it has been made to signify intellectual weakness, as if the strength of understanding was the perversion of it, or as if integrity and good sense were so seldom united as at length to appear inconsistent. But is it not strange, that among those who glory in the distinction of rational beings, which in great measure consists in the faculty of communicating our thoughts to each other, it should be esteemed an argument of intellectual merit, to make use of that faculty without any meaning, or thereby to conceal our real thoughts? The opinion is too absurd for even dishonest men to profess.

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THEY therefore, take refuge in the corruption of another word, and allege that prudence suggests a disguise to be necessary against insidious men, and that it argues strength of mind to restrain for prudential reasons the natural tendency of the best heart to be open and communicative. But not to mention, that the exercise of this cardinal virtue hath it's bounds, which whenever it transgresses it ceases to be prudence, it is to be considered, that the principle, in the exercise of which consists our greatest strength of mind, is not that which distinguishes what is politic or what is impolitic; the understanding of very bad men will suffice for this; and if this be our highest merit, then this world is all we are concerned with, the laws and the promises of GOD are absolutely useless to man. To a christian the great excellence of our nature is that divine principle call'd conscience, which after having instructed us in our duty, may, if we have power enough over ourselves, become a law to us, and by the assistance of divine grace, influence the whole of our conduct. Hence the fear of GOD, which puts the powers of conscience in motion, is called the beginning of wisdom. And when men esteem prudence the highest perfection of the understanding, and upon that supposition extend it to dissimulation, they forget, that this wisdom of the world is foolishness with GOD.

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THE most perfect man in his intellectual powers, is doubtless he that has the clearest knowledge of his duty, and uniformly perseveres in practising it. We need no proof of this doctrine, and we have great authority to support it; our blessed SAVIOUR, DAVID, SOLOMON and St. PAUL, the last of whom expressly affirms the foolishness of God, to be wiser than men. Indeed it is hardly a question amongst moral men, it cannot be among christians, which of the two argues greater abilities of mind, to dissemble and depart in any degree from the truth, thro' an apprehension of consequences, or to keep up simplicity of heart, to take heed to the thing that is right, in contempt of all consequences? Certainly, the former is the effect of a mean temporizing spirit, the latter is one of the marks of true magnanimity.

AND this was the great accomplishment, which distinguished your late excellent pastor. In him there was no guile. Those who knew him and observed the whole tenor of his life, need not have simplicity of heart explained by a labor'd definition. His character was such an image of it, as no definition can give, and the instruction it conveyed was beyond all the powers of language. He had in no part of his conduct more than one intention, and whatever merit bad men may attribute to the double-dealing of a politician, he proved that he had abilities superior to craft and
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deceit,

deceit, by keeping the faculties he was blest with under the direction of conscience.

SINGLENESS of heart, would in a being that acted by instinct have no claim to merit; and when in the inferior parts of life we observe frequent instances of it, we do some injustice to persons of higher rank, if we abruptly condemn them upon the comparison. There are great allowances due to the seductions to which such persons are exposed, and to which their inferiors are absolute strangers. But if this extenuates the guilt of dissimulation in high life, it reflects a lustre upon his character, as he had all the temptations which usually mislead men, yet throughout the course of his life maintained a right intention, and never professed more than he meant or intended.

VIRTUE being easy and habitual to a good mind, it has the advantage of neither needing nor having recourse to those unnatural expressions, with which bad men set off the little virtue they have or pretend to. Hence his conversation was free from the austerities of mistaken piety, and the assuming dogmatical air of false virtue. Simplicity of heart and true humility are ever inseparable. If we mean only to please God, we

neither overvalue ourselves, nor endeavor to heighten the estimate of our merit in the minds of others. He had most of the advantages which men usually boast of, but he never obtruded them upon the observation of the world, and if ever he mentioned any occasionally, it was with gratitude to the hand from which he derived them. Hence, having no thoughts of exalting himself, he was not tempted nor disposed to abase other men, and he was truly exalted in this, that whenever any thro' mistake or malice injudiciously tried to debase him, it drew pleasantries instead of resentment from him.

NICE and scrupulous justice is so essential to simplicity of heart, that it seems almost superfluous to mention that as his characteristic. He extended it even to those little punctualities, that are reckoned among the lesser morals, which men of honor think it no disgrace to neglect; but his justice being founded in the most inviolable principles, neglects of this sort were at least as offensive to his rectitude of mind, as a blemish is to a delicate eye. And it was no wonder, that a character so just in every respect, to which it was needless to fortify itself against the temptations to gross injustice, should be the more intent upon those minute deviations from the rule of right,
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which may weaken the influence of that rule, and abate the power of conscience.

BUT let us consider how his simplicity was connected with a more delicate species of justice, benevolence. That the heart of man is naturally benevolent, is an observation which has been too often made and exemplified to require any proof. When men are malicious, or uncharitable, or narrow-minded, they substitute other motives in the place of the natural ones. Now as simplicity of heart consists in having but one view, that of our duty, the obstructions to benevolence are thereby obviated, and the natural motives to it, with which God hath furnished us, have ample room to operate. Thus the purest of all characters, that of our SAVIOUR, was the most benevolent; and when a rich man consulted him about the way to life, he put his religious simplicity to the trial, by recommending to him the highest act of benevolence, that of selling his property, and giving it to the poor. Simplicity having thus removed all the obstructions to this godlike disposition, there remains but one thing to assist the work of nature, in exerting the benevolent tendency of the heart, and that is the influence of christian principles, for these in a great proportion increase the natural warmth, 'till the heart becomes

becomes fruitful in every good work. And this was the case of his honest benevolent heart.

THE tender and constant affection, with which he sustained the conjugal and parental character, was not the least among his virtues, and how great a share soever nature might claim in producing that attachment, he shewed by the steadiness and uniformity of it, that it was in him the work of religion and reason. There was not a person connected with him too low to be an object of the cheerfulness of his temper; and they were sensible of this, for his benignity of heart diffused an air of satisfaction and happiness among all his dependents. The affluent circumstances in which providence had placed him, instead of administering to luxury, or irritating his appetite to wealth and power, were made instruments of happiness, as far as he could extend them. He was liberal in his contribution to most of the public charities, and his benefactions to the poor that fell within his knowledge were much more considerable than is generally known. The bare mention of a fellow-creature in distress he considered as a hint to himself, and often amazed the person, who undesignedly gave him the hint, by some signal act of charity, exercised, as the apostle prescribes, with simplicity.

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THE same temper of mind rendered him warm and invariable in friendship. It is rightly esteem'd a matter of prudence not to be too precipitate in contracting this important connexion, nor unguarded in admitting too many to our confidence. But to a man of his simplicity great part of this caution was needless. He had nothing to conceal from the world, for he knew he could conceal nothing from God. It is prophaning the sacred name of friendship to affix to it the idea of a combination. The person who won his esteem might freely enjoy his friendship, and tho' he thought the foibles of his friend were intitled to all possible candor, yet he withdrew his affection the moment he found him wanting, in the most essential requisite to an honorable connexion, virtue and probity.

HIS friends, besides all the pleasures attending that relation to him, had the benefit of whatever weight and interest his station gave him; and they had this advantage in their connexion with him, that he sought nothing for himself, but the pleasure of promoting their happiness, which by his alliances and character he had frequent opportunities of doing. So that without the arts and anxiety of ambition, by the mere dint of contentment and simplicity of heart, he, during great
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part of his life, fully enjoyed that luxury of doing good, which ambitious men allege to be the object of their schemes.

THE loss of such an individual is great to a community, considering how little attention men usually pay to the body of which they are members. His zeal for the protestant establishment, his concern for his country when that establishment seemed to be in danger, his candid and peaceable way of judging of the administration of public affairs, and the earnestness with which he promoted any design that had a tendency to public good, are virtues, seldom mentioned in a character so private and so void of ostentation as his. But they are virtues, which render the most private character valuable to the public, as the practice of them, if it be general, is the foundation of national strength and prosperity.

A mind thus disposed, with respect to God and the world, was eminently qualified for the pastoral care. You have felt his zeal for religion, and his hearty endeavors for your salvation, in the many edifying discourses he delivered from this place, which were so enforced by the weight of his cha-

character, that he generally sent away his congregation with a disposition to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Besides his preaching and his exemplary life, he had an undissembled affability and condescension to all ranks of his parishioners, which conciliated to him their affections, whenever he expressed his good-nature by some friendly inquiry, or wish for their welfare. He considered his parish, as a more extensive family under his œconomy, and it was natural for them, with this opinion of his benevolence, joined to that of his example and simplicity of heart, to consult him in all their conscientious scruples; for to whom would a man in doubt so readily have recourse, as to the most honest man, to him who demonstrates how clearly he can distinguish between right and wrong, by continuing invariable in the practice of right? In every science he that improves his theory by practice will of course become the most enlighten'd professor. In religion the rectitude of his heart will have an influence upon his judgment; for "the light of the body is the eye; therefore if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." By the eye is evidently meant the intention; if that be single, the whole man is illuminated, the clouds of prejudices which darken other minds, are dispell'd in his. And as Our SAVIOUR makes the doing the will of

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God necessary towards distinguishing the genuineness of his doctrine, so we may without any other authority than that of common sense affirm, that he that doth the will of God, from principle, must be supposed to know it.

It was natural, that a man who had advanced so far towards the perfection of his nature, should in a high degree enjoy the happiness connected with religion and virtue. And it was the general observation of all that knew him, that he was in every respect a most happy man. The tranquillity of mind which arises from religion, the joys which result from beneficence, the good health which is the general effect of temperance, and the happiness of seeing the community he lived in the better for his existence, are pleasures which he enjoyed with very little interruption to the end of his life. He knew besides how to extract happiness from a thousand incidents, which a mind less virtuous and serene than his would have passed by with indifference. Even his pleasantries were among his virtues, for they were not consistent with a bad character, being under the regulation of conscience; and tho' from what he experienced within himself a cheerful aspect immediately made a favorable impression upon him, yet his piety and benevolence never suffered the amusements of

of a social hour to transgress their bounds. Thus, with the consciousness of an uniform course of right action, joined to his worldly prosperity, he was perhaps one of the happiest among the sons of men.

WHAT other men thought of him was a consideration to which he attended no farther, than as Reputation might assist him in his ministerial duty. In other respects he did not govern his conduct by so capricious uncertain a rule as the opinion of the world, but by the knowledge natural and acquired which he had of his duty. Reputation is a very good rule of life, when men have neither honor nor conscience. A strict regard to it preserves them from those overt acts of injustice, which endanger society and must end in their own ruin. But reputation is a very imperfect rule for a christian, especially when it is to be acquired amongst men, whose judgment is not always under the direction of their reason, and but very seldom swayed by the doctrines and precepts of their religion. Reputation among such men he magnanimously disdained, I mean in the moral and religious part of his conduct, in which his first and principal point in view was the satisfaction of his own conscience, and that did not suf-

fer him to love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

MARK the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Indeed his ways were ways of pleasantness, and all his paths were peace; for tho' he never solicited reputation, it was naturally conferred by good men, upon an integrity so uniform and undeviating as his. He had the familiarity and confidence of many persons of conspicuous rank both in church and state, and perhaps none of them ever mentioned his name, without prefixing to it some strong epithet expressive of the simplicity of his heart. It is observable, that after a whole life spent in intercourse with mankind, and with many men to whose character his own was so opposite, he had hardly a single enemy; at least if he had, the enmity was unprovoked, and it was forgiven.

Alas! this Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile, is departed this life. We can enjoy him only in idea; and all the pleasure and improvement we may receive from a review of his exemplary life, will be attended with the bitter regret, that so amiable, virtuous and beneficent a character is withdrawn from our observation. But the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all
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mankind

mankind is in the hand of the LORD. His will be done, tho' in the present case it is to all appearance a grievous calamity. Our consolation is, that it is in our own power to alleviate every infliction of providence, either by the manner of bearing it, or by the religious use to which we apply it. And the use of this affliction is very obvious, for the highest honor we can pay to his memory is, to be influenced by it to imitate his virtues. So shall we meet him again in a society, the happiest of all others, for it will consist of characters like his, and we have the promises of God and the merits of CHRIST to insure us against the pain and grief of another separation.

F I N I S.



